



THOMAS L. GARTHWAITE, M.D.
Director and Chief Medical Officer

FRED LEAF
Chief Operating Officer

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
313 N. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 240-8101

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Gloria Molina
First District

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke
Second District

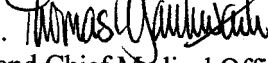
Zev Yaroslavsky
Third District


Don Knabe
Fourth District

Michael D. Antonovich
Fifth District

March 5, 2003

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D. 
Director of Health Services and Chief Medical Officer

Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H. 
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

SUBJECT: BI-WEEKLY UPDATE ON MRSA IN JAIL AND MSM

On February 11, 2003 your Board requested that the Department provide an update on the methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and syphilis outbreaks, including the provision of information about MRSA at all newborn facilities and the County's Jail Intake Center. This is to provide a status report on these issues.

Update on MRSA in the Los Angeles County Jail

The preliminary count for 2002 is 920 new cases of MRSA wound infections in inmates in the Los Angeles County Jail (data for December is preliminary). There were a total of 102 new cases of wound infections in January 2003. No deaths were reported.

Study of Jail Interventions

Public Health has been working with Sheriff's Department medical staff at the Jail to design a feasible intervention that may reduce the occurrence of new MRSA cases. Since there is little hard evidence of what works to control such infections in correctional facilities, we hope to be able to measure the efficacy of our actions so that, if successful, our experience will assist other facilities facing this problem.

The chosen intervention, based on input from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), is for inmates to use antibacterial liquid soap for bathing for a short term and to increase their access to daily hygiene (e.g. showers). Public Health will monitor the numbers of new skin infections, as well as potential adverse outcomes and measures of compliance.

A CDC researcher has been brought on board to assist with this evaluation; she is currently designing the study in conjunction with Public Health, jail medical and correctional staff. The details and projected cost of this intervention should be available by our next report.

Risk Factors for MRSA Infections Among Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM)

The case-control study to evaluate the risk factors for MRSA skin infection among MSM is continuing. Its specific purpose is to ascertain risk factors for the disease so as to design intervention strategies and targeted prevention messages to those determined to be at high risk. Five clinical practices are involved in reporting MRSA cases and information to Public Health for the study. The Office of HIV/AIDS Epidemiology, Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Control Program, and the Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology are providing resources to interview cases and controls. To date, contact information on 24 cases of MRSA among MSM have been reported to DHS. Of these, 22 cases have been interviewed. Contact information on 45 controls has been reported; 8 of these controls have been interviewed. Both HIV positive and HIV negative MSM are part of the study. Data entry from these interviews will begin this week and preliminary analysis will help determine how many patients will need to be recruited into the study to obtain useful results.

Outreach has been made to other clinics that serve the MSM community. Public Health is working together with selected clinical laboratories and clinical practices to obtain data on MRSA to help track patterns of disease.

Community Awareness

Materials on MRSA skin infections have been prepared for the public (English and Spanish) and healthcare providers; they are posted at the Acute Communicable Disease Control (ACDC) Unit of Public Health web page <http://lapublichealth.org/acd/MRSA.htm>. Informational material was transmitted by e-mail to every hospital infection control practitioner and over 900 physicians enrolled with the Department to receive public health bulletins. A longer article will be appearing in the next issue of *The Public's Health*, which is sent to over 23,000 healthcare providers and is due out by the end of the week. Information about the outbreak and the fact sheets were also shared with clinics which treat persons with HIV/AIDS.

MRSA in Newborns

In 2002 there was one outbreak of MRSA skin infections among newborns who were otherwise healthy. The outbreak was resolved and there have been no new MRSA skin infections among infants. Please note that occasionally there are clusters of MRSA in newborns already hospitalized and undergoing invasive medical procedures. These infections should not be confused with MRSA skin infections seen in otherwise healthy infants.

Syphilis Among MSM

The Department is scheduling a meeting with the owners of bathhouses and sex clubs and is convening an intradepartmental group to examine opportunities for combining syphilis screening with HIV testing.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please let either of us know.

TLG:JEF:dd
tgjfA0041M2003_MEMO2

Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors